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Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
Sixtieth session

Summary record (partial)* of the 1275th meeting
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Monday, 16 February 2015, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Mr. Heenan (Human Rights Treaties Division)

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* No summary record was prepared for the rest of the meeting.

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Mr. Heenan (Human Rights Treaties Division) took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Opening of the session

1. **The Chairperson** declared open the sixtieth session of the Committee.

Statement by the Representative of the Secretary-General

2. **The Chairperson**, speaking on behalf of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, welcomed all the members of the Committee. He said that the Committee had played a central role in the adoption of General Assembly resolution 68/268, on strengthening and enhancing the effective functioning of the human rights treaty body system. The backlog of reports to be dealt with by the Committee was now 51 and was growing. However, with the support of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and thanks to the extra 1.3 weeks of meeting time granted by the General Assembly, the Committee would be able to meet the 2015 target of 28 reports and a similar number of lists of issues. Given the recent budget cuts, OHCHR would focus its efforts in 2015 on helping committees to reduce their backlogs and reaching the targets set out in resolution 68/268.

3. The Committee had chosen English, French and Spanish as its working languages and had requested that Arabic should be included on an exceptional basis. In line with resolution 68/268, he urged the Committee members to exercise moderation regarding the number of meetings and documents for which they requested Arabic.

4. The General Assembly had also recognized the need for increased harmonization of working methods, which would make the treaty bodies more accessible to States parties and stakeholders. He hoped that the Committee would continue setting an example in its rationalization of working methods. He welcomed the Committee's decision to offer the simplified reporting procedure to States parties with overdue reports but which had submitted an updated common core document.

5. The Committee was encouraged to continue working on implementing the guidelines on the independence and impartiality of members of the human rights treaty bodies (Addis Ababa guidelines) and to consider adopting the guidance note for States parties on the constructive dialogue with the human rights treaty bodies and the framework for the concluding observations, as well as establishing a mandate for a rapporteur on reprisals. The chairpersons of the United Nations human rights treaty bodies had discussed those issues, including the possibility of a common treaty body policy on reprisals.

6. The General Assembly had asked the Secretary-General to submit a report on the implementation of resolution 68/268 every two years. OHCHR had begun collecting data and tracking progress in that regard. Those reports would be used to ensure that committees received regular budget resources commensurate with their backlogs as well as adequate meeting time and staff. The reports would also be used in a future review of the treaty body system. The application of the Addis Ababa guidelines would also be reviewed, with chairpersons being requested to update States parties on progress made. The Committee should reflect on how best to implement the guidelines and think about setting up an internal mechanism to keep track of progress.

7. On 4 December 2014, the Secretary-General had issued a synthesis report on the post-2015 agenda, entitled "The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming all Lives and Protecting the Planet". In it he recalled that human development also meant respect for human rights and that gender equality and women's empowerment and rights must be realized in all regions of the world.

8. In a joint statement on the post-2015 development agenda, the chairpersons of the United Nations human rights treaty bodies had welcomed the emphasis placed on equality and non-discrimination in the synthesis report, as well as the two gender equality goals. They had also urged Member States to include an explicit reference to sexual and reproductive health rights as part of upcoming negotiations on sustainable development goals.

9. Member States were entering the final phase of negotiations leading to the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda in September 2015. Those discussions would be crucial in ensuring that the goals, targets, indicators and accountability frameworks set under the sustainable development goals were closely aligned with human rights norms, particularly those enshrined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

10. The main focus of the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women would be on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and current challenges affecting its implementation and the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women. In 2015 the Commission intended to adopt a political declaration to mark the twentieth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women. The draft declaration recognized that the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the fulfilment of obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women were mutually reinforcing in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women, but made no reference to the Committee's contribution to implementation of the Platform for Action.

11. **Ms. Schulz** asked whether the Commission on the Status of Women intended to adopt the political declaration on the first day of its session. If so, that would deprive NGOs of the opportunity of contributing to it. She also wondered whether it would be possible to revisit the draft in order to include mention of the Committee's work. Lastly, she asked whether the decision by OHCHR to focus on backlogs and on helping treaty bodies to achieve their targets would have an impact on the committees' ability to deal with inquiries and general recommendations.

12. **Ms. Gabr**, supported by **Ms. Pimentel**, **Ms. Haidar** and **Ms. Arocha Dominguez**, said she was concerned at the new restrictions on working languages and their impact on the ability of women generally to follow the Committee's work.

13. **Ms. Acar** said that she wondered what kind of "internal mechanism" the Chairperson had in mind for monitoring implementation of the Addis Ababa guidelines.

14. **The Chairperson** said that he did not know when the Commission on the Status of Women intended to adopt the political declaration or whether civil society bodies would have the opportunity to contribute. The possibility of including a reference to the Committee's work in the declaration could be raised with the new representative of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) in Geneva.

15. As to budget cuts and their impact on treaty bodies' ability to deal with inquiries, he said that resolution 68/268 allocated resources to help reduce backlogs in the consideration of periodic reports and individual communication and set performance targets for the committees. There was no way of knowing what impact that would have on OHCHR support to other areas of work such as dealing with inquiries. However, priority must be given to compliance with the resolution in terms of the reduction of backlogs. Once the Committee had formed a working group on inquiries, it would be easier for OHCHR to indicate how much support it could provide in that regard.

16. As to the working languages of the Committee, he reiterated the decision taken by the General Assembly as set out in resolution 68/268 and pointed out the importance of making sparing use of a fourth language.

17. Lastly, he said that he would discuss the issue of the Addis Ababa guidelines with the Committee in closed session.

Solemn declaration by new and re-elected members of the Committee

18. *Ms. Acar, Ms. Acosta Vargas, Ms. Arocha Domínguez, Ms. Chalal, Ms. Gabr, Ms. Al-Dosari, Ms. Halperin-Kaddari, Ms. Hayashi, Ms. Hofmeister, Ms. Nadaraia, Ms. Patten and Ms. Schulz made the solemn declaration provided for in rule 15 of the Committee's rules of procedure.*

Adoption of the agenda and organization of work (CEDAW/C/60/1)

19. **The Chairperson** asked whether the Committee wished to adopt the provisional agenda contained in document CEDAW/C/60/1.

20. **Ms. Arocha Domínguez** said that she would have liked to see more time assigned to procedural and budget issues, especially the question of restrictions on the translation of Committee documents. She accepted the agenda in principle but reserved the right to raise those issues subsequently in closed session.

21. *The agenda was adopted, subject to the reservation of Ms. Arocha Domínguez.*

Report of the Chairperson on activities undertaken between the fifty-ninth and sixtieth sessions of the Committee

22. **Ms. Ameline** (Chairperson of the Committee) said that the number of States parties to the Convention and the Optional Protocol remained at 188 and 107 respectively. The number of States that had accepted the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention was also unchanged at 69.

23. Twelve States parties had submitted their periodic reports since the beginning of the last session. Seven periodic reports had been returned because they exceeded the 21,200 word limit established in General Assembly resolution 66/268 and the States concerned had been asked to submit shortened versions. The status of the report submitted by Trinidad and Tobago, which slightly exceeded the word limit, was pending clarification. Seven States had asked to submit their next periodic report under the simplified reporting procedure.

24. The campaign to secure the Committee's candidature for the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize had been officially launched in January 2015 by the French National Assembly and had already garnered the support of 48 national parliaments and more than 500 parliamentarians and senators.

25. She had attended two important events in November 2014: a conference on women and sustainable development organized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), at which she had emphasized the importance of education and the Committee's work in that area; and an event organized by the Arborus Fund, which worked to promote gender equality in the private sector, that had brought together leading enterprises from around the world. Also in that period, responding to tightening budget restrictions and Committee members' growing concerns, she had begun investigating alternative means of funding that would guarantee the sustainability of the Committee's activities in the future.

26. In January 2015 she had attended the meeting of chairpersons of the human rights treaty bodies, at which two important joint statements — one on the post-2015 development

agenda and one on freedom of expression — had been adopted. Further work was needed to develop a united and coherent strategy for full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. With that in mind, in March 2015 she would be representing the Committee at two Beijing+20 conferences – the first in Chile and the second in Paris.

27. **Ms. Zou** Xiaoqiao said that she had spoken at several events related to the implementation of the Convention in China, including a conference on international law organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a seminar on follow-up to concluding observations organized by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the All China Women's Federation. Her activities had also included giving a lecture on the Convention to law graduates of Beijing University and participating in a half-day dialogue on the principles of the Convention with a high-level ministerial delegation from Cambodia.

28. **Ms. Schulz** reported that she had contributed to training programmes on gender equality and non-discrimination organized for diplomats active within the Human Rights Council and, along with members of the Committee against Torture, had attended a seminar on the implementation and follow-up of concluding observations, organized by the World Organization Against Torture.

29. **Ms. Haidar** said that, in addition to attending the meeting of chairpersons of the United Nations treaty bodies mentioned by Ms. Ameline, she had contributed to a regional seminar on moving away from the death penalty in the Middle East and Africa, at which she had drawn attention to the discriminatory use of the death penalty for women accused of adultery and *zina* (sex outside marriage). At a seminar examining best practice in fighting violence against women, hosted by the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) in Tunisia, she had highlighted the importance of adopting comprehensive laws against domestic violence.

30. **Ms. Patten** said that her capacity-building activities during the intersessional period had included contributing to a regional training workshop on the Committee's general recommendation No. 30, organized in Jakarta by the Global Network for Women Peace Builders, a training workshop for NGOs in Uzbekistan, on the preparation of shadow reports, and training in the Convention and the Optional Protocol for human rights officers of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) working in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

31. **Ms. Gbedemah** reported that she had given a presentation about preventive social services at the first International Women and Justice Summit in Istanbul, which had been co-hosted by the Ministry of Family and Social Policies and the Women and Democracy Association. While the prevailing view at the conference had been that access to justice was the primary tool in combating violence against women, she had emphasized that gender equality should be accorded equal importance in policy development and prevention strategies.

32. **Ms. Gabr** said that, in her capacity as chair of the informal working group on article 14, she had participated in a conference organized by WaterLex, a Geneva-based NGO, to address the need for a binding document on the rights of rural women. Similarly, at the World Human Rights Forum in Marrakech, she had spoken about the need for a binding document to combat violence against women. In Egypt, she had contributed to the Federation of Women's efforts to promote the participation of women in the forthcoming political elections. She had also given a series of lectures on the integration of gender in peacekeeping organized by the Centre for Conflict Resolution and Peacekeeping in Africa, as well as a number of media interviews on women's role in building societies.

33. **Ms. Pimentel** said that she had attended two events in Argentina on the legalization of abortion, organized with support from human rights groups including Amnesty International, members of academia and representatives of State agencies. A central aim of both events had been to present the legalization of abortion as a universal human rights issue rather than an exclusively women's issue.

34. **Ms. Pomeranzi** said that, having closely examined the synthesis report on the post-2015 development agenda compiled by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, she had been concerned to note that, linguistically, the report tended to present women as victims rather than as subjects of human rights. She also believed that human rights should be accorded greater centrality. She suggested that the Committee should submit comments on the report. In Italy, meanwhile, she had been working closely with NGOs to promote dialogue on human rights in Southern European countries and support regional network-building.

35. **Ms. Leinarte** said that she had given a presentation on the exploitation of women in prostitution at the Women and Justice Summit in Istanbul, during which she had explored the legalization of prostitution in Islamic cultures and countries.

36. **Ms. Acar** said that her intersessional activities had included giving a presentation on the Committee's general recommendation No. 30 and its implementation, at a training event organized in Ankara for field personnel of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), particularly staff working on the Syrian border. Participants at the workshop had considered the use of the Convention as an instrument of refugee status determination.

37. She had also given presentations at the Rome conference held to mark the entry into force of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) and at the Asia-Pacific Intergovernmental Meeting in Bangkok. At both events, she had sought to elucidate the close links and interdependence between the Istanbul Convention and the general principles enshrined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

38. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** said that she had spoken about the treaty bodies and their role in promoting women's rights, at an international conference for Jewish lawyers and judges in Israel. She had drawn particular attention to the Committee's general recommendations, which were still not sufficiently widely known.

The discussion covered in the summary record ended at 11.25 a.m.